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ABSTRACT

The Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) serves at-risk preschool children in community programs, including Head Start programs, private for-profit programs, non-profit programs, and programs within public schools. This report to the Colorado legislature provides information on participation in the program, collaborations of CPP with other early childhood initiatives, and sample findings from local program evaluations. The report includes a list of risk factors qualifying children for the program. Evaluation findings summarized in the report indicate that after 9 months in the program, both Spanish- and English-speaking children made significant progress in linguistic skills. In selected school districts where kindergarten teachers were surveyed in the Fall regarding the readiness of CPP graduates, it was found that only 17 percent of CPP graduates were rated below grade level, in comparison to national ratings of about 40 percent. Returns on Colorado's investment of $2,727 per child for the CPP include findings that CPP students can perform at a level similar to their peers on state standardized achievement tests. Almost all CPP families agreed that their child benefited as a result of CPP participation, that their child has the skills needed for school success, and that they are comfortable participating in their child's education. The report notes that CPP monies have been used to fund full-day kindergarten slots; one participating school has reported that children in full-day kindergarten programs perform better on third grade achievement tests that children not attending full-day kindergarten. (KB)

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COLORADO PRESCHOOL PROGRAM:

2003 Report to the Colorado Legislature

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COLORADO PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

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Colorado Preschool Program

2003 Legislative Report

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Colorado Department of Education Organizational Commitment: The Colorado Department of Education dedicates itself to increasing achievement levels for all students through comprehensive programs of education reform involving three interlocking elements: 1) *High Standards* for what students must know and be able to do; **2) *Tough Assessments*** that honestly measure whether or not students meet standards and tell citizens the truth about how well our schools serve children; and **3) *Rigorous Accountability Measures*** that tie the accreditation of school districts to high student achievement.

INTRODUCTION

The Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) was enacted by the General Assembly as part of the Public School Finance Act of 1988. The program serves children who lack overall learning readiness due to individual and family risk factors. These risk factors increase the likelihood that children will drop out of school at an early age, will need special services in the later years, will fail to achieve their full potential, and will become involved in criminal activities.

- The Colorado Preschool Program was authorized to serve 11,050 children in the 2002-03 school year.
- 154 out of 178 (86%) of the school districts in Colorado now participate in CPP. Participation on the part of school districts is voluntary.
- One thousand and five hundred of the available 11,050 CPP slots must be used to provide full day kindergarten services.
- CPP serves approximately 16% of the four year olds in Colorado.
- In the 2002 school year, 89 school districts identified 5,644 children that were CPP eligible, but were unable to serve them because of a lack of CPP slots.
- In 2002, the Legislature provided school districts the flexibility to serve three year olds in CPP, if they had three or more risk factors present in their lives (the qualifying risk factors are included on page 4 of this report). The following school year (2002-2003), 85 school districts chose to use 992 slots (9%) to serve children younger than 4.

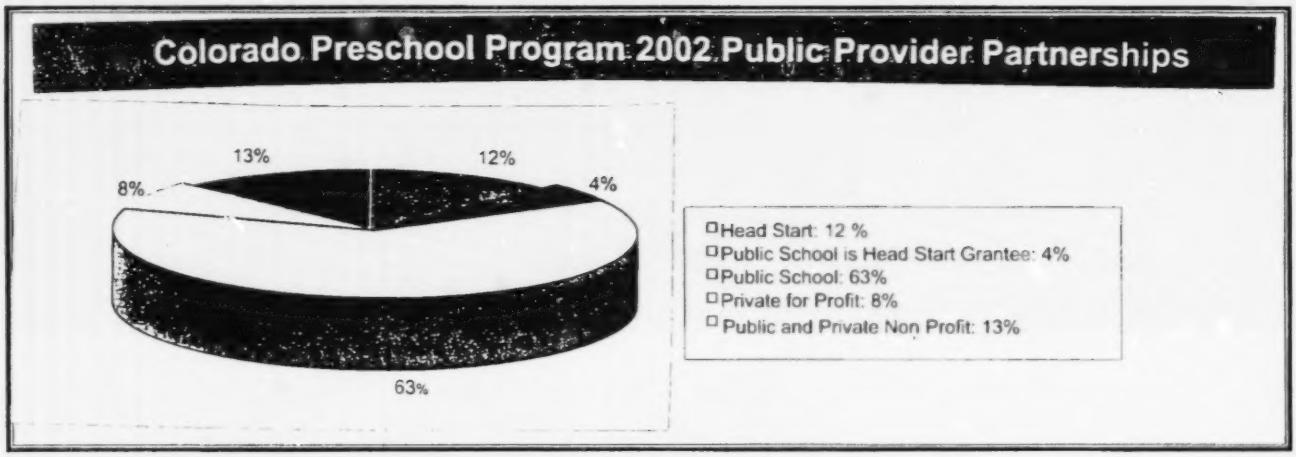
"Until we had the Colorado Preschool Program funding we had families who would never be able to afford, nor would they make the effort to provide any services for their child in a preschool setting. Many parents were ashamed that their income was too low to be able to pay tuition and were too proud to request a free lunch or scholarship program and would therefore wait until their child actually began kindergarten or first grade. Oftentimes this meant these students were behind socially, nutritionally, and academically." ***Calhan School District***

"As a director of our local school board, I see numerous successes that come from our preschool program. A foundation of learning, discipline, caring and sharing is established while in preschool. These positive experiences when they occur in the early stages of education set a precedence for children that will follow them throughout their years of schooling.

Director, Otis School Board of Education

Colorado Preschool Program Collaborations

The CPP legislation gives communities the freedom to decide locally who is best qualified to deliver CPP services. The intent of the law is to provide children and their families with the highest quality services available. As a result, Colorado Preschool Program children are served throughout the state in Head Start programs, private for-profit programs, non-profit programs and programs within pubiic schools.



The Colorado Preschool Program is also an important partner with a number of other initiatives in providing services to children and families:

- **$4.4 million "State Match" for the Federal Child Care Block Grant Fund**: In 2002 the Colorado Preschool Program provided a state match for the Child Care Block Grant Funds that enabled Colorado to "draw down" an additional $4.4 million in Federal revenue.

- **Early Childhood Special Education**: Eighty percent of school districts report that they blend Colorado Preschool Program funds and early childhood special education funds to create federally mandated inclusive or least restrictive early childhood environments.

- **Colorado Even Start**: Ten of the eighteen Even Start Programs within Colorado collaborate with CPP programs to provide early childhood education to children within their programs.

- **Consolidated Child Care Pilots**: 59 of the school districts participating in CPP are active participants in the 17 Consolidated Child Care Pilots.

Who Are the Children Served in the Colorado Preschool Program?

"Our students originate from families where the educational level of parents is low, where there are a high number of single parents, and where poverty is a way of life. These problems, coupled with a high mobility rate, the need for many of the students to acquire English as their second language, and poor social skills demands that we intervene now or pay the price later."
Gilcrest School District

The following risk factors, as defined by CPP statute, qualify a child for the Colorado Preschool Program: low income, homelessness or frequent relocation, an abusive adult residing in the home, drug or alcohol abuse in the child's family, parents were teenagers and unmarried at time of child's birth, parents did not complete high school, poor social skills, in need of language development, and receiving services from Human Services as a neglected or dependent child. School districts report that children who participate in CPP have an average of 3.7 risk factors present in their lives. What does an average of 3.7 risk factors look like in a school district program? Examples from one district include:

1. Young boy currently being raised by great grandparents/no contact with mother or father/history of drug and alcohol addiction by parents.
2. Young girl abandoned by mother at 3 months of age/being raised by grandmother and father/father attended one room school house/low-income/tried to staff to special education but father refused services/number of consultations with the school psychologist.
3. Young girl being raised by a single parent/ mother was a teen at birth/income level at $500 monthly/child was sexually abused by uncle when she was 3 years of age.
4. Young girl with single parent who was a teenage mother at birth/high school education only/low-income/moved frequently during child's life.
5. Young boy with single mother/low income $13,000 a year/high school education/father is an alcoholic.
6. Young girl with low income/mother lives with Uncle/currently pregnant with Uncle's child/15-year-old sister is also pregnant/struggles greatly with emotional issues/just recently moved to Colorado.
7. Young girl's family makes less than $600 per month/great speech difficulties/father is currently unemployed.

"Inequality at the Starting Gate"

A study released in September (2002) by University of Michigan researchers found that America's disadvantaged youngsters start kindergarten significantly behind their wealthier classmates – with the most disadvantaged kids scoring 60 percent below those at the top of the socioeconomic scale on oral pre-reading and pre-math tests.

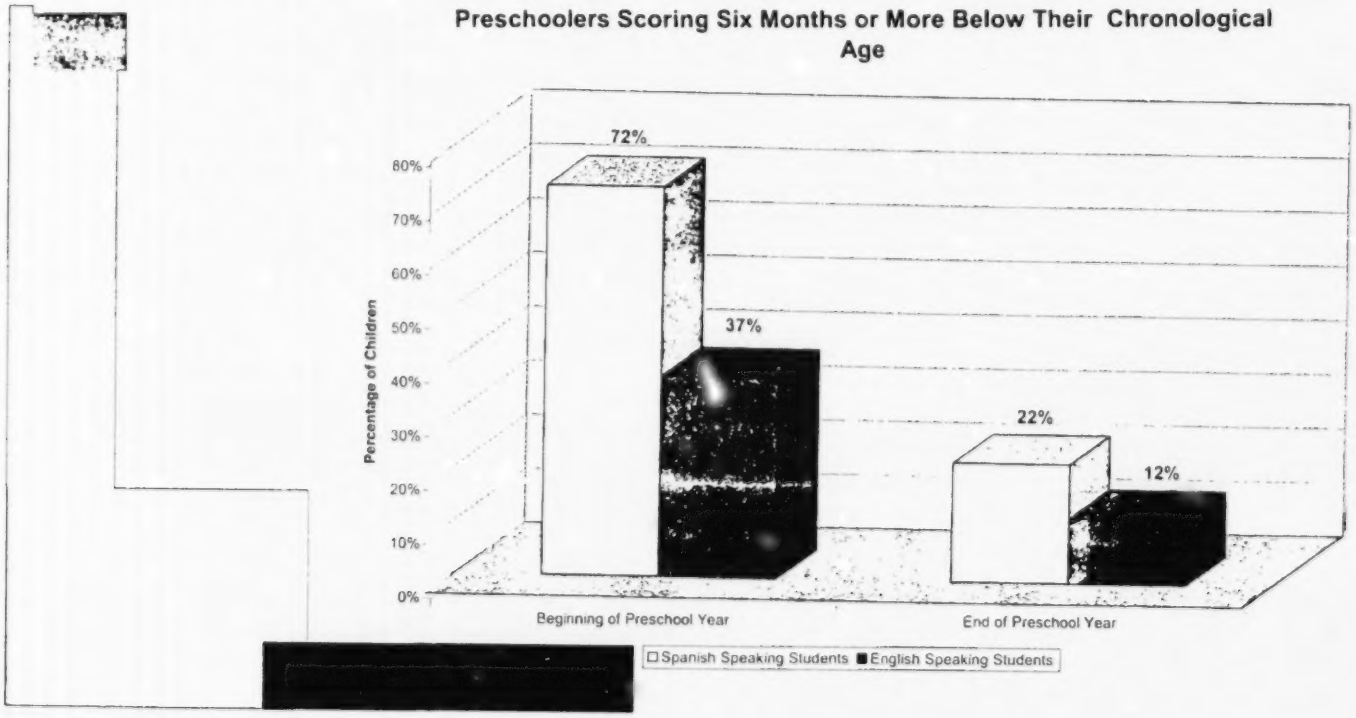
The study found that this "inequality at the starting gate" could be at least partially offset by attending preschool or a child-care center, yet the most disadvantaged children are the least likely to attend. Researchers found about 65 percent of the students in the highest socioeconomic group attend an early childhood program compared with 20 percent in the lowest group.

"Inequality at the Starting Gate," by Valerie E. Lee and David T. Burkam – Copyright 2002 by the Economic Policy Institute.

In Colorado…

In Fort Lupton, dramatic differences in linguistic skills were reported between the Spanish and English speaking children as they entered preschool. More than twice as many English speaking children were beginning school with linguistic skills "at or above age level". Within a preschool classroom there was as much as a three to four year range in language skills.

After nine months in the Colorado Preschool Program, significant progress was made by both groups of children. In the Fall, 72% of the Spanish speaking group was scoring 6 months or more below their chronological age. At the end of the school year, the percentage of Spanish speaking children scoring 6 months or below their chronological age had dropped to 22%. As a result, this inequality was addressed before many of these children entered kindergarten.



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School Readiness

Nationally, forty-six percent of kindergarten teachers report that at least half of their pupils have specific problems with entry into kindergarten, including lack of academic skills, difficulty following directions, disorganized home environments and problems working independently (Rimm-Kauffman, et al., 2000). In Colorado, in a 2001 Educare survey of kindergarten and first grade teachers, it was found that teachers believed four out of ten children (40%) entering the classroom were not academically prepared to learn.

Research also indicates that those children most at risk for later school difficulty typically do not catch up with their peers during the year (West et al., 2001). In that same Educare survey, when asked to rate the statement, "Children who start behind academically catch up with others during the academic year", 25% of kindergarten and 33% of first grade teachers say rarely, while 70% of kindergarten and 62% of first grade teachers say sometimes.

"Overall, year after year the students who attend preschool are better prepared for kindergarten. They have in place social skills, are better able to follow a routine and have had some introduction to letters and numbers. Also literacy skills seem to be better developed."

Park RE-2 Kindergarten Teacher

The Colorado Preschool Program can clearly demonstrate that it does improve kindergarten readiness. In selected school districts where kindergarten teachers are surveyed in the Fall regarding the readiness of CPP graduates, it was found that experiences in the Colorado Preschool Program can dramatically decrease the number of children identified as below grade level. In those school districts only 16.7% of CPP graduates were rated below grade level by their kindergarten teachers (compared to the 40% reported above). Similar results are being reported by other districts across Colorado.

- **Pueblo #60**: The success of the program is evidenced in the Phelps Kindergarten Readiness Scale, which was administered to all CPP students in March of 2001, and the overwhelming evidence is that the majority of students exiting D-60's preschool classrooms were ready to enter kindergarten.
- **Monte Vista**: The kindergarten teachers in the building were able to identify with great accuracy the students in their classes who participated in the preschool program the prior year.
- **Canon City**: The percent of CPP children rated as "ready" for kindergarten has been consistently close to the percent of children rated ready in the district.
- **Springfield**: The data indicates the students received a great benefit through the experiences supported by CPP funding.

Early Childhood: A Wise Investment

- Researchers at the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) recently conducted a benefit-cost analysis of one of the nation's most respected early education programs, the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention project in North Carolina. The bottom line? Taxpayers received a four-to-one return on their investment, in addition to significant social dividends and including better school success. Specifically, school districts can expect to save more than $11,000 per child because participants are less likely to require special or remedial education.

- The Chicago Child Parent Center study produced a present value of $48,000 in benefits per child from a half-day public school preschool (an average of 1.5 years attendance) for low-income children.

"Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success, just as early failure breeds later failure. The later in life we attempt to repair early deficits, the costlier the remediation becomes."

James J. Heckman, PhD, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences

What is the return on Colorado's investment in CPP?

In the 2001-02 school year the average cost to provide the Colorado Preschool Program for one child was $2,726.50. This year 105 school districts participating in CPP were able to provide data on how their CPP graduates performed on the 2001 third grade reading assessments. **Clear results were presented showing that when the most disadvantaged students in the state are provided a high quality early childhood experience they can perform at a level similar to their peers. CPP graduates, who have been identified as at-risk of experiencing school failure, scored within 3% of the state average in the advanced category, and within 2% of the state average in the proficient category on the third grade CSAP.** Other specific examples of the "returns" on the investment in CPP include:

- **Lamar**: In third grade, former CPP participants scored higher than the district average on the reading CSAP.
- **Sargent:** The first class of CPP children are now in junior high, and for the first time the junior high has improved from a low rating to an average rating on the school accountability reports.
- **Cripple Creek:** 91% of preschool students scored proficient or advanced on the third grade CSAP. In the entire school district only 73% of third graders scored proficient or advanced.
- **Jefferson County:** 81% of children in Jefferson County who participated in the Colorado Preschool Program scored proficient or advanced on the third grade CSAP. Of the remaining children in the district, 79% scored proficient or advanced on the third grade CSAP.
- **Denver:** On the Spring 2001 CSAP, the percentage of students across Denver Public Schools scoring at the proficient or above level was 50%, while 56% of the prior CPP students in Denver scored at the proficient or above level

Closing the Achievement Gap

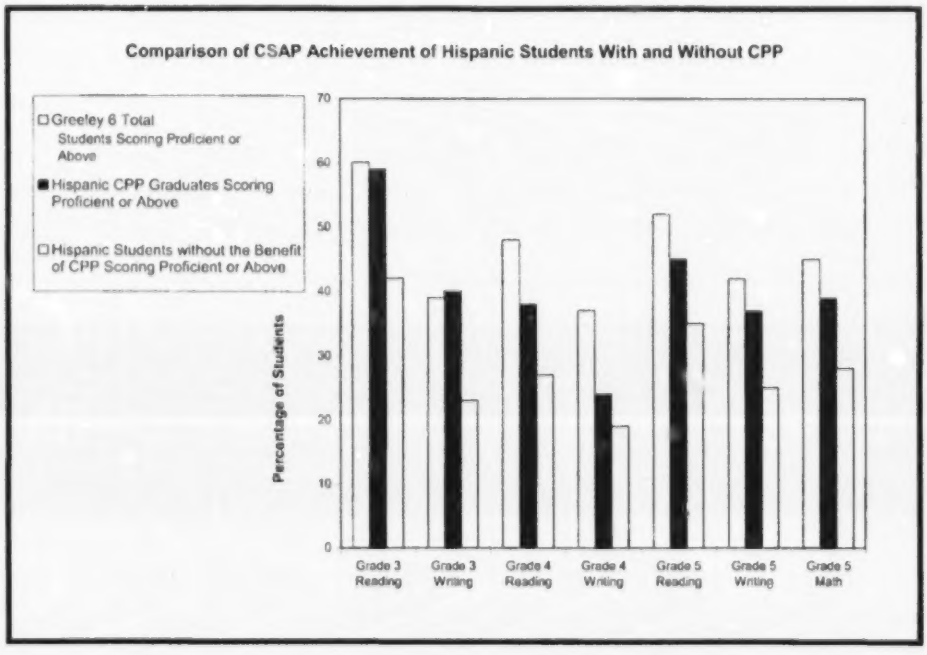
"Early childhood is both the most critical and the most vulnerable time in any child's development. Our research and that of others, demonstrates that in the first few years, the ingredients for intellectual, emotional and moral growth are laid down. If they are not, it is true that a developing child can still acquire them, but the price rises and the chances of success decrease with each subsequent year. We cannot fail children in these early years."

T. Berry Brazelton & Stanley Greenspan in The Irreducible Needs of Children

Having risk factors present in a child's life does not preclude high achievement. Some children have fewer opportunities for enrichment during the years before they enter school. Evidence collected on the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) demonstrates that CPP is a powerful tool for school districts in closing the achievement gap. Below is a chart that compares the Greeley #6 CSAP scores in third grade for:

- all children within the school district,
- Hispanic children who are CPP graduates
- Hispanic children who did not have the benefit of attending the Colorado Preschool Program.

Greeley #6 found that Hispanic children who are able to attend a quality early childhood education program do as well or better on their third grade CSAP's as their peers within the district. Hispanic children who do not have that opportunity score at lower levels. The achievement gap for these students continues to be bridged through the fifth grade.



Voices of Families

Programs that are able to engage parents in their child's education can strengthen parents' ability to support their children and reinforce the learning that occurs in the classroom. This is why CPP requires programs to have a written plan for parent involvement, and parents are asked to enter into an agreement with the program that specifies what this involvement looks like. This year each CPP program surveyed families and asked the same three questions. The survey responses are a strong indication of the effectiveness of CPP:

- 98% of families strongly agree or agree that they believe their child has benefited as a result of being in CPP
- 97% of families strongly agree or agree that their child has the skills he or she needs to be successful in school
- 97% of families strongly agree or agree that they are comfortable participating in their child's education.

"I feel that my child has learned so much especially coming from a Hmong background where he knew almost no English."
Westminster Parent

"My son is shy and timid, but being a part of this preschool program has enabled him to gain confidence. He enjoys going. If we hadn't been funded we wouldn't be able to afford to send him to preschool." ***Cherry Creek Parent***

"I am very pleased with this program. My children are number one to me and whatever I can do to better their education I will do! To me that is what is important." ***Las Animas Parent***

"CPP has given my son confidence in himself and made him eager to try new things." ***Boulder Valley Parent***

"CPP has been wonderful for my daughter...The staff has helped me to teach her better at home. I think this was by far the right stepping stone for my child." ***Harrison Parent***

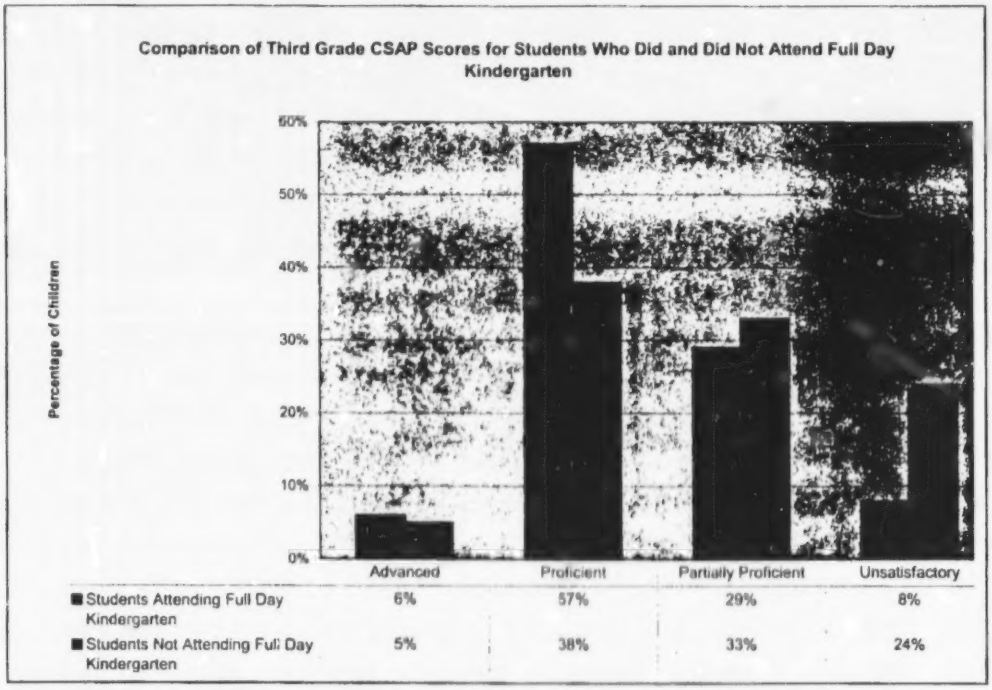
Without CPP my son may not have been ready for kindergarten. I especially liked the way I was involved by the teacher at the beginning of the year and involved with the assessment. Thanks so much for giving my son the chance to attend." ***Canon City Parent***

"Attending preschool has greatly assisted my son with social skills. A year ago he was pushing other children almost daily. He is now learning to be more respectful with peers."
Telluride Parent

Colorado Preschool Program Funded Full-Day Kindergarten

In 1996, the Legislature authorized 500 CPP slots to be used for full-day kindergarten programs: these slots were allocated to five school districts. In 2001, the number of maximum allowable full day kindergarten slots in CPP was increased to 1,000 and the number of school districts operating full day kindergarten programs expanded to 26. As these districts continue to implement their programs, data will be collected on the effectiveness of full day kindergartens.

Roosevelt-Edison, a charter school in Colorado Springs District #11 has participated since the original full-day kindergarten pilot was funded through CPP. Their data indicates that children in full-day kindergarten programs perform better on third grade CSAP's than those children not attending full-day kindergarten.



Other participating school districts have reported the following after one year of implementation:

- *When scores were compared for the pre (fall) and post (summer)assessments for full and half day classes for all students, the differences between the scores indicated the full day kindergarteners had made statistically significantly more progress than their half day kindergarten counterparts. In most of the assessments, full day students started with lower scores and ended the fourth quarter with scores at or higher than the half day students."*

  Englewood School District

- *"The structure of the CPP kindergarten classroom is definitely one reason these students have achieved so much this year. Having a low student teacher ratio with a paraprofessional allows more time to individually focus on our students and their academic needs."*

  Lake School District CPP Kindergarten Teacher

- *"Almost without exception, teachers have been pleased with the progress made by students in the all-day program. The extra attention students receive in a small class with two adults has benefited them greatly."*

  Brighton CPP Coordinator

"Helping all children start school ready to learn is critical to their future success and the well-being of society as a whole. Children who start school behind their peers are unlikely to catch up. Children who enter kindergarten with limited word reading skills are the most likely to develop later reading difficulties and require remedial education. Even with this subsequent extra help, they continue to lag; children who are not at least modestly-skilled readers by the end of their grade are unlikely to graduate from high school. Poorly-educated workers are increasingly unable to earn a living wage in a global marketplace where skills matter more than ever before. Society pays in many ways for failing to take full advantage of the learning potential of all its children, from lost economic productivity and tax revenues to higher crime rates to diminished participation in the civic and cultural life of the nation. Our democratic values are also betrayed when we fail to live up to our ethical and moral obligation to safeguard the health and well-being of all young children."

Preschool for All: Investing In a Productive and Just Society – A Statement by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development

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